

thursday evening series

THE DANCERS AND MUSICIANS OF THE BURMESE NATIONAL THEATER

Dancers:

Daw Nu Nu Khin
Daw Khin Than Htay
Daw Mary
U Myint Swe
U Soe Nyein
U Sein Win
U Tin Tun

Musicians:

U Sein Chit Tee, Leader of Orchestra
(Patt Waing, drum circle)
U Soe Tint (Kyi Waing, brass gong circle)
U Shwe Tun (Maung Hsaing, brass gong
square)
U Mya Gyi (Nhai, flute)
U Than Tun (small cymbal and clapper)
U Than Aung (big cymbals and big drum)
U Kyi (bass drums)

Director: U Than Myint

October 9th, 1975 at 8:30 p.m.
MacMillan Theatre, Edward Johnson Building

Burmese Dance Technique

These basic movements and patterns which Burmese dancers are taught before they begin to learn dances, take four years to master. About 25 exercises are learned each year. Since there are different variations for men and women, there are as many as 200.

Beginning with bending exercises, to the accompaniment of rhythmic drumming, the movements become more and more intricate, involving the head, hands, feet, and shoulders. Each pattern is an 8-count phrase, separated by 2-to-4 count transitions.

a. Movements for Women

Daw Nu Nu Khin
Daw Khin Than Htay
Daw Mary

b. Movements for Men

U Myint Swe
U Soe Nyein
U Sein Win
U Tin Tun

The Dance of the Nat Votaress

At the beginning of the program it is traditional to appeal to the nats (spirits) to ensure a successful performance. The ritual music accompanying this dance has been preserved exactly as it was originally played, because of fear of offending the spirits if changes were made.

Daw Khin Than Htay or Daw Mary

The Prince Returns from Taxila

One of the main scenes in Burmese drama is the return of the prince from the ancient university of Taxila bringing his bride with him. Since the only means of travel in olden times was on foot, the journey was rough and tiring.

The bride feels the strain of travel. To soothe her, the prince tries to divert her attention to the beauties of the scenery, the flowers, and the cool shade of the trees. Finally, he offers to carry her.

U Myint Swe and Daw Nu Nu Khin

Zawgyi Dance

The zawgyi, a sorcerer, enjoys superhuman powers such as flying in the sky, passing through earth and water, and bringing to life the tree-born fruit-maidens with whom he dallies.

U Soe Nyein

* * INTERMISSION * *

TALES FROM THE RAMAYANA

Dasagiri and the Invitation to Parasurama

Parasurama receives King Janaka's invitation to participate in a bow contest. Whoever wins, will receive Princess Sita's hand in marriage. The invitation is accompanied by a portrait of Sita. Since Parasurama is "practicing austerities" (ascetic rites), he throws the invitation out, and it gets blown away by the wind, falling right in front of Dasagiri (Ravana). Dasagiri falls in love with the princess depicted in the portrait.

U Sein Win and U Tin Tun

The Bow Contest

To win the bow contest, the bow must be lifted from the ground and strung. Dasagiri, who is the strongest of all competitors, can only lift it, but nevertheless he demands Sita's hand in marriage. Rama and Lakhana come to her rescue. To Dasagiri's surprise, Lakhana not only lifts up the bow, he also strings it. But then he puts it down, and urges Rama to lift and string it. Rama easily accomplishes this feat.

The object of this scene is to portray love of justice and active resistance against injustice.

U Sein Win, U Myint Swe, U Tin Tun, U Soe Nyein, Daw Nu Nu Khin

Rama and the Enchanted Deer

Dasagiri sends an enchanted deer to Rama and Sita's abode. Sita wants the beautiful deer, and although Rama warns her that the deer is a demon in disguise, she will not listen. And so Rama, because of his love for Sita, goes after the deer, deep into the forest, leaving Sita unprotected.

The object of this scene is to show human weakness in the face of temptation.

U Sein Win, U Myint Swe, U Tin Tun, U Soe Nyein, Daw Nu Nu Khin

Sita's Rejection of Dasagiri's Courtship

The demoness attending Sita tells her of Dasagiri's flying chariot and his enormous wealth, trying to persuade her to submit to Dasagiri. She also tries to entertain her. Dasagiri appears and woos Sita, who uses her scarf as a defense against him. She successfully rejects all his advances.

The object of this scene is to show the value of resistance to temptation.

U Tin Tun and Daw Nu Nu Khin

The Dancers and Musicians of the Burmese National Theater are on their first tour of the United States. No performing art has ever come to the U.S. from Burma before.

Members of the group have toured in Thailand, China, the USSR, Nepal, India, the United Kingdom, and in Malaysia.

The first record of the existence of Burmese dance dates back to 800 A.D. Buddhist themes were prevalent, but there may also have been some Hindu influence. Burmese royalty tried to preserve these arts by having them performed at all important royal events. In the 18th century, after the Ramayana (Rama Zat) was translated by Burmese composers and dramatists, incidents of the Ramayana began to be performed. Besides dance and music supported by royalty, Burma developed a great abundance of folk music and dance. Songs and dances derived from nat (spirit) worship, a form of animism still in existence in some parts of Burma, are very popular even now. In addition, there is an elaborate marionette theater tradition (there is an old saying among Burmese dancers that when a human dancer dances he must be like a puppet, and when the puppet dances he must be like a human dancer), and a strong drama tradition around which an entire repertoire of musical arrangements to convey types of scenes, actions, and characters has developed.

The tour of the Dancers and Musicians of the Burmese National Theater is sponsored by the Performing Arts Program of the Asia Society under a grant from Lila Acheson Wallace.

Next Event: Tuesday, October 14, 1975 at 8 p.m. — Lecture
Demonstration by Dr. Peter Williams, Edinborough University,
Scotland on the "Organ works of Bach"

Next Thursday Evening Series: November 13, 1975 at 8:30 p.m.
Gabrieli String Quartet